

Research Article

THE ECONOMY OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Extending different styles of open and distance learning (ODL) has transformed Education and training economy. ODL is a new approach to create a new economy. Modern economy creates new motivation and removes major obstacles for learning based dynamic economy. Extending different styles of ODL has created various markets in learning that provides more opportunity and bases for comprehensive growth. One of the most efficient and effective opportunities that E-learning and ODL Provide is cost reduction in Educational and administrative dimensions. Although it seems unnatural and irrational at first sight because ODL extension requires to handle modern technology. Having high cost in technology characteristic and naturally extensive enjoyment schools and other Learning and training sector from Information technology (IT) show Cost increase. This issue only at the beginning Education systems equipment is true to IT. After educational training equip to modern technology, costs will be reduced in both long and short term levels. ODL is expressed in three axes, optimality update educational method, financial saving and preventing educational time wasting that every axis has a constructive role in reducing costs, efficiency and human force productivity. This article tries to at first brush up discussion related to ODL economy then takes steps about economic appraisal and explaining economic advantages of ODL then it expresses economic objectives of ODL.

Keywords: *Economy, Open and Distance Learning, Education Learning, Communications and Information Technology, Productivity, Cost, Providence, Economic Efficiency, Educational Efficiency*

INTRODUCTION

Today s global economic crisis has affected all domains. Even learning domain has been undermined and has been afflicted to numerous challenges. For getting rid of this global crisis and preventing reduction of learning quality and quantity, we must move away from traditional education toward modern one. Increasing learning costs, widespread demand for learning, limited capacity of traditional learning institutes, applying to change in learning methods have driven the world methods that there in time and place have lost their own intrinsic value. Effectiveness and efficiency of learning have been increased for learner is in power to select time and place. So ODL (open and distance learning) can be supposed one of the most important factors of scientific and cultural acceleration. Currently and soon it will be as the main index of information society.

Developing different styles of ODL caused education economy transformation. Distance learning is a new way for creating modern economy. Modern economy creates numerous economic motivations and eliminates basic hindrances of education to develop dynamic economy. Developing various styles of ODL has established special and various markets in education that provide a lot of base and opportunities for comprehensive growth.

Distance learning is one of the best and most important strategies to pass globally of economic crisis, administrative and financial barriers, equipments and human force. It is also the greatest carrier of educational saving in the world. ODL has caused countries think more about costs reduction and new slogan ((the less cost, the more, better, wider and high quality education has been widespread educational institutions. Thanks for educational revolution in the world since 70s decade, The education attitudes towards efficiency and effectiveness of education is rapidly transforming into ODL.

The Economy of ODL

Rapid development in technology especially IT and communications has made a lot of changes in the process of teaching and learning. Changing traditional approaches of teaching and learning and developing ODL s E.learning, ... are the most effective transformations that IT has made in the process of

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teaching and learning. IT and communications caused finding new forms of education such as virtual learning, E. learning, virtual labs and ..., that new opportunities of learning by accelerating learning and making easy the facilities and educational communications caused quality and quantity increase go educational efficiency and remove the existing reductions. These new opportunities plus to teaching students, in relearning teaches, increasing skill, updating and renovating Job's knowledge is also effective.

While IT and communication is in parallel of increasing capabilities and abilities of one sector of society and expend it, it will affect other capabilities of same society. For instance, if E. learning cause to expending education among people, education development cause to increasing capabilities and abilities and optimizing human resources, human resource development is the sub base of society development in different dimensions. The role and the function of E. learning in educational systems are in two dimensions: administrative and educational that developing any dimension provides facilities for next dimension.

ODL and E-learning provides cost reduction in educational and administrative dimensions as one of the most effective and efficient opportunities in education office. Although at first sight may be it seems unnatural and irrational because developing ODLs depend on modern technology usage. Availing high cost is one of the characteristics of technology and naturally extensive enjoyment of schools and other sectors of education office of IT imply cost in increasing, but this issue is true only at the beginning of equipping educational systems to IT. After teaching and training to equipment type modern technology costs will be reduced in long and short levels, E-learning's in long term resulted increasing skills, capabilities and abilities of learners by increasing efficiency level and educational quality by this way, it helps a lot to develop human resources in future.

At short level in administrative and educational dimensions, educational costs will be reduced. In administrative dimension E- learning saves energy by accelerating and facilitating information offering and automating administrative and executive affairs. In cybernetic there's a rule implying that energy and information are in reverse ratio. This is a common rule and thoroughly experienced in the whole fields. Naturally, the more information and knowledge the lesser energy consumption, at last reducing energy consumption leads to costs reduction, at educational dimension decreasing costs doesn't imply reducing quality and quantity of learning and verse, it means increasing quality and quantity of learning and decreasing learning energy consumption that are following information and knowledge acquirement.

Role and Position of ODL S in education doesn't confine only to learning - teaching actors but even it has affected administrative patterns of educational system that caused to strengthening decentralization in educational system and more participation of parents, teachers, students, and society in decision making about educational activities.

E-learning's plus to facility and spend in decision making and performance, has facilitated supervision, control and evaluation. In this way, it has increased efficiency and productivity of decentralization systems, besides, in centralized systems by reinforcing decision making system and information based management, difficulties of extent and organization scattering have been rectified, control and coordinate among different sectors of organization is feasible. So, nowadays most of the problems of administrative and executive can be solved. Administrative and executive problems of centralized educational system can be solved by ODL,s.

In addition to advantages that ODL avails by nature, one of the most important reason for necessity and developing ODLs centers and institutions is increasing demand for learning that regarding resources limitation and educational capability at now educational system has been converted a complex sociological issue and improving ODL efficiency can solve part of these problem.

Economical Evaluation of ODL

The biggest passing restriction from traditional society to industrial one was the problem of investment and is passing to informational society doesn't essentially have this characteristic. Passing to industrial society is long, costly, investment, spacious and hardship. It involves much great construction, much more capitals and is late output.

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Any stage of developing various forms of ODL causes saving and decreasing the costs and it is valuable for increasing efficiency with fairly low investment. In fact in every steps of this movement the necessity of high investment in many parts will delete or decrease to more extent. Consequently, each stage of this movement itself is profitable. Increasing efficiency and human force productivity as the most important Factor in lasting development has the lion share in development of ODL. Although developing different forms of ODL has many non-financial advantages and provide many opportunities in educational systems but economic justification and its financial problems are very important issues and perhaps the first question in any instructional organization before applying ODL is that does ODL causes costs saving ? Or on the other hand, does investment in ODL economically is justifiable? Finally does added value of ODL balance the cost or not? In this section, we deal with the economical comparison and calculation the rate of saving in ODL costs in comparison with common and traditional instruction.

1. Primary and steady costs: these costs are investment types and are paid once and don't repeat for a long time and even can be used for other activities such generalization physical facilities, purchasing instruction building and hardware (about 5 years), in traditional instruction the primary and steady costs rather than ODL is lower, but its variable cost such as support, supplies and maintenance in comparison with ODL is very high. If steady costs of a technology project are high but its variable costs are low, here, the cost on scale will be increased. This state is in ODL

2: Opportunity cost: long time is required for traditional learning in this period. Practically learners aren't able to do anything and their profitability and efficiency is down below. This hidden cost at least is equal to received salary of staff meanwhile they are teaching. ODL caused reduce lost opportunity cost for noticing learning time period and non-limitation to special time and space.

3: The operational costs of learning: there are three kinds of costs to administrate learning operations:

A) The cost of journey and stay in learning building: in traditional learning and countries with wide geographical scattering that aren't equally developed and learners have to move from one city to another for acquiring this cost is more. In ODL as time and space limitation is eliminated and learning doesn't limit to particular place like classroom in and out of city Journey and stay in learning building aren't necessary. So, in this section the costs are extremely reduced.

Experts believe that replacing ODL with traditional learning causes costs reduction about 50 percent. That major portion of this reduction relate to relocation needless of professor and student.

B) Designing costs and creating learning material: At the beginning of developing ODL for designing and providing learning material separately for each title of unit and reviewing it in particular time distance, accepting the costs and using experienced experts are required. but after designing and producing material regarding low price of publishing electronic material and transition easiness, we will observe costs reduction.

C) The costs of presenting the learning material: in traditional learning regarding extensive learning requirement and many learning auxiliary instruments, limitation of people participation at classes, the cost of presenting, and the learning material is high. Traditional learning systems require employing more staff for presenting education, this has affected increasing costs, but in ODL regarding concentrated learning and covering large number of learners, needless to physical spaces and employing staff and decreasing depreciation of learning institutes, material presentation cost is few, and this issue depending on the concentrated use of educational is effective in reducing learning share cost.

The Economic Advantages of ODL for Staff

At a glance to function of ministries of education and high education in a few years ago and taking measures about applying ODL, it is easily clear that in administration and performance modern learning systems of ODL, ministries were a forehead in middle east, and they were able to solve the economic and social problems of learning to more extent. Teachers and administrative and educational staff reduction, using conventional and tuition fees forces esp. in education caused, concerning the volume of work, this serious opposition and contrast with releasing staff and trainees to attend in skilled and educational courses in learning centers. The economic problems of attendance instruction has made the staff eagerness reduced in learning periods.

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Concerning the economic advantages, although currently quantity number isn't presentable but undoubtedly, considering the costs of duty commission and the costs of going and returning traffic, trainees residence in educational centers will save more yearly and also socially viewpoints, basically as learners wouldn't have to leave workhouse and also their families, we can imagine many advantages.

The objectives of ODL can be expressed in three axes: optimality, updating educational approaches and financial savings and preventing wasting the instructional time of managers and experts that attending in the classes isn't possible for them. Briefly we can put financial burden reduction and financial savings of ODL in two categories: holding courses and staff participation in educational course.

1: Reducing financial burden of forming educational courses: reducing side costs (settling, food, reception, classroom, the costs of fee, supplies, depreciation of educational tool, the costs of professional staff and ...) is possible by ODL.

2: Reducing financial burden of attending in educational courses: by ODL save in costs like going and returning traffic of staff, financial burden as a result of staff non-attendance because of participating in the courses, the costs of mission, linking attendance and acquirement together in staff, s workhouse, relaxation of staff for lack of anxiety of going to education place and preventing staff time wasting.

Economic Purpose of ODL

Using ODL provides many basic and major purposes of economy that each one is influenced by instruction. Briefly these purposes are:

-To help providing skilled human force of society

-To help relearning employed forces for compatibility with new working revolution and preventing unemployment.

-To help enrich human capitals and increasing their efficiency and productivity.

-To make favorable setting for entering knowledge and technology factor into learning world.

-To help decreasing costs through research and to use internet and intranet.

-To help changing and improving consumption patterns across community by increasing national knowledge.

-To use ODL as a strong strategy in economy and trade.

-To help keeping safe the environment by reducing traffic and noisy and air pollutions

-To make a favorable bed for knowledge circle in society that nowadays is more important than knowledge reproduction

-To provide a suitable bed to constant development through discovery and to train potential aptitudes and to help to enable people

Conclusion

Extension of open and distance learning is one of the solutions for education problems and intricate because it is thrifty both economically and quantitatively.

Using educational strategies by applying suitable technology for costs reduction and increasing efficiency and optimizing the costs of education are main principle of economy of ODL.

Ana finally developing of ODL is the base of economy thought and infra structure efficiency of human force and active and dynamic economy.

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